

Message Text

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SUBJECT: LDP WINS RECENT LOCAL ELECTIONS DESPITE LOCKHEED

SUMMARY. DESPITE OPPOSITION EXPLOITATION OF LOCKHEED SCANDAL, LDP RETAINED TWO CONTESTED DIET UPPER HOUSE SEATS IN NARA AND OITA AND GOVERNORSHIPS OF GUMMA, YAMAGUCHI, AND FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURES IN RECENT ELECTIONS. TRADITIONAL CONSERVATIVE VOTING PATTERNS, OPPOSITION INEFFECTIVENESS, AND LDP'S SUPERIOR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILL WERE MAJOR FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CONSERVATIVE SUCCESS. HOWEVER, SOME SLIPPAGE IN ELECTORAL SUPPORT, EVEN IN TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE AREAS, MAY INDICATE TROUBLE FOR LDP IN DIET LOWER HOUSE ELECTION LATER THIS YEAR. END SUMMARY.

1. DESPITE OPPOSITION EXPLOITATION OF LOCKHEED ISSUE, LDP CANDIDATES DEFEATED OPPONENTS IN FIVE IMPORTANT PREFECTURAL ELECTIONS IN LAST THREE MONTHS. CONSERVATIVES THUS MAINTAINED CONTROL OF UPPER HOUSE SEATS IN NARA AND OITA PREFECTURES AND THE GOVERNORSHIPS OF GUMMA, YAMAGUCHI AND FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURES.

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2. IN NARA PREFECTURE, CONSERVATIVE TOSHIO NORIGUCHI WON LANDSLIDE VICTORY OVER SOCIALIST NAOTO SASADA AND COMMUNIST YOSHITAKA IWATA IN SEPTEMBER 26 ELECTION TO FILL UPPER HOUSE SEAT LEFT VACANT BY DEATH OF LDP INCUMBENT. RESPONDING TO LOCKHEED, NORIGUCHI, A FORMER LOCAL MAYOR, RAN SELF-CONSCIOUSLY "INEXPENSIVE AND CLEAN CAMPAIGN" TO BEAT SECOND-PLACE SASADA BY ALMOST ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND VOTES. HOWEVER, VOTER TURN-OUT, 49 PERCENT, WAS POOREST IN PREFECTURE'S POST-WAR HISTORY FOR AN UPPER HOUSE ELECTION.

3. MASAO GOTO, AN INDEPENDENT RUNNING WITH LDP SUPPORT, CAPTURED ANOTHER UPPER HOUSE SEAT IN OITA PREFECTURE IN A SPECIAL ELECTION ALSO HELD ON SEPTEMBER 26 TO FILL VACANCY CREATED BY DEATH OF PREVIOUS LDP DIETMAN. GOTO, FORMER PRESIDENT OF OITA UNIVERSITY, NARROWLY DEFEATED SOCIALIST CHALLENGER, KOICHI HAMADA, BY FIFTEEN THOUSAND VOTES; A COMMUNIST CANDIDATE RAN A DISTANT THIRD. VOTER TURN-OUT WAS 68 PERCENT, DOWN FROM 81 PERCENT IN PREVIOUS UPPER HOUSE ELECTION.

4. ON SEPTEMBER 19, LDP-SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT ISAO MATSUDAIRA OVERCAME SERIOUS CHALLENGE FROM SOCIALIST TADASHI YAOITA -- WHO WAS SUPPORTED BY SOCIALISTS, COMMUNISTS AND KOMEITO -- TO MAINTAIN LONG-STANDING CONSERVATIVE CONTROL OF GOVERNORSHIP OF FUKUSHIMA PREFECTURE. VOTER TURN-OUT WAS 81 PERCENT -- A RECORD FIGURE FOR A GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION -- BECAUSE ISSUE OF LDP CORRUPTION AND REFORMIST ALTERNATIVE WAS SO SHARPLY DRAWN. JUST A MONTH BEFORE, FORMER LDP GOVERNOR HAD BEEN ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF BRIBERY, AND OPPOSITION ATTEMPTED TO LINK THIS LOCAL SCANDAL TO NATIONAL ISSUE OF LOCKHEED. CONSERVATIVES RESPONDED BY MOBILIZING THEIR ORGANIZATION TO FULLEST, STRESSING ACHIEVEMENTS OF LDP RULE AND PRESENTING MATSUDAIRA, A LOCAL ARISTOCRAT AND FORMER CABINET MINISTER, AS A "CLEAN, PRESTIGIOUS CANDIDATE." MATSUDAIRA WON BY EIGHTY THOUSAND VOTES, BUT PREVIOUS LDP GOVERNOR HAD WON HIS LAST ELECTION BY OVER FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND. AND OPPOSITION VOTE DOUBLED THIS TIME TO FOUR HUNDRED NINETY-FIVE THOUSAND.

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5. LDP CANDIDATE TORU HIRAI, PREFECTURAL VICE GOVERNOR, DEFEATED OPPOSITION-FRONT OPPONENT AKIRA MATSUMURA TO WIN GOVERNORSHIP OF YAMAGUCHI PREFECTURE ON AUGUST 22. ALTHOUGH MATSUMURA STRESSED LOCKHEED, LDP SUCCESSFULLY EMPHASIZED LOCAL ISSUES AND CLAIMED INDEPENDENCE FROM SCANDALS IN CAPITAL. HIRAI WON BY OVER ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND VOTES IN BALLOTING, WHICH SHOWED 60 PERCENT VOTER

PARTICIPATION.

6. ICHIRO SHIMUZU, LDP CANDIDATE FOR GOVERNOR, BEAT YUZURU YAMADA, WHO WAS BACKED BY ALL OPPOSITION PARTIES, IN GUMMA PREFECTURE ON JULY 25. SHIMUZU, A FORMER CHAIRMAN OF PREFECTURAL ASSEMBLY, GOT 484,459 VOTES TO 373,443 FOR HIS OPPONENT.

7. COMMENT. RESULTS OF THESE FIVE ELECTIONS INDICATE THAT LDP HAS BEEN ABLE TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE AREAS DESPITE DAMAGE OF LOCKHEED SCANDAL. CONSERVATIVE SUCCESS STEMS LARGELY FROM TRADITIONAL VOTER AFFINITIES, SUPERIOR ORGANIZATION AND INEFFECTIVENESS OF OPPOSITION. LDP ALSO PROVED SHREWS IN ADOPTING STYLES AND ARGUMENTS TO MINIMIZE EFFECT OF SCANDAL ON VOTERS' MINDS, I.E., STRESSING LONG RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN FUKUSHIMA AND SUPPORTING "CLEAN" INDEPENDENTS SUCH AS GOTO AND MATSUDAIRA. NEVERTHELESS, THERE WERE NEGATIVE INDICATORS AS WELL FOR CONSERVATIVES. FUKUSHIMA, YAMAGUCHI AND GUMMA ARE LARGELY RURAL, DEEPLY TRADITIONAL PREFECTURES AND RESULTS THERE MAY NOT BE REPRESENTATIVE OF VOTER REACTIONS IN OTHER PARTS OF COUNTRY. FURTHER, DEEP INROADS MADE IN CONSERVATIVE STRENGTH IN SUCH TRADITIONAL LOCALES AS FUKUSHIMA MIGHT SUGGEST TROUBLE FOR LDP, EVEN IN ITS LONG-TIME STRONGHOLDS, IN LOWER HOUSE ELECTION LATER THIS YEAR.
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